

Ambulance fees are dead and someone owes us an apology

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There are so many things one can say about the proposed ambulance fees.

Thankfully the one thing we can say is that it is dead - At least for now.

Issues like ambulance fees, the ICC and other ridiculous proposals have a way of rising from the ashes of their graves not so much like a Phoenix, but more like a vampire.

Hopefully with the defeat of the referendum this month, we've driven a stake through Ike Leggett's pet vampire.

I have never understood the interest in this issue even as I've written many a column denouncing the proposal as the worst sort of fiction.

At essence the county wanted to raise \$12.9 million by charging insurance companies a fee to transport people to the hospital. A fee, Leggett told me and everyone else who supported it told me, wouldn't be passed on to the consumer.

Yes, I and most other people who've dealt with insurance companies saw through the fiction and overwhelmingly voted against the proposal.

But I, like County Councilman Phil Andrews want to know, why?

Why did Leggett put such energy into raising a mere \$12.9 million, an amount that is less than a third of a percentage point of the overall county budget and an amount which could be saved many other places - including printing and the executive's discretionary funds judging by the amount of money the county poured into this effort.

That brings up another point and further makes me wonder. I want a full accounting of how much the county spent in in-kind contributions by making county staff work on this issue, and by forcing county career firefighters to man the polls and campaign for this on election day and the weeks leading up to election day. I will file a freedom of information request because I suspect while it wasn't \$12.9 million it was a significant figure.

Why was there such a coalition assembled to try and force this fee on us? Why did Leggett, after being turned down twice take this issue to court? Why did he continue to push this against all logic and all reason?

Why did he force a split between volunteer and career firefighters? They have to work together and have to have each others' backs in the worst of conditions. Why did we jeopardize that working relationship for such a miniscule sum?

Why did Leggett tell us to tighten our belt when he wouldn't tighten the county belt? Why did he threaten to layoff firefighters if this measure wasn't passed?

In short, what is going on?

I'm sorry, but the use of firefighters on the clock and in uniform to campaign for this referendum violates the county's laws against employees being involved in politics. Never mind the excuse that it's not politics, but a "referendum," that's pure unadulterated baloney of the worst kind.

It's like calling a tornado a bag of wind. Doesn't matter what you call it, it is what it is - and a referendum is most definitely political. Now Andrews must introduce legislation in the county to specifically prohibit county employees from being involved in Election Day lobbying for referendums. More waste of time.

Nothing makes sense about this issue. Andrews is right on several points. I've never, ever seen the county so geared up for an issue. And it was much ado about nothing as far as a percentage of the budget. It makes no sense.

It makes no sense to get all of those state legislators, county office-holders and everyone else working so hard for something so wrong.

The county voters owe the volunteer firefighters and their lawyers a great deal of gratitude for fighting this fight. They defended the democratic process.

Those who tried to subvert the process owe us all an apology. And we all owe them enough to remember their names come next Election Day.